Five-Star Restoration Program

The Five Star Restoration Program promotes partnerships among citizen groups, local businesses, schools, youth corps organizations, private landowners and government agencies to undertake projects that restore local streams and wetlands, while educating communities about the important role these habitats play in maintaining their quality of life. Its objective is to engage five or more partners in each project whose contributions of funding, technical assistance, workforce support or other in-kind services are matched by the Five Star program funding assistance. Consideration for funding is based upon the program's educational and training opportunities in particular for students and at-risk youth, the ecological benefits to be derived, and the project's other cultural and economic benefits to the community.

Five Star grants are modest, ranging from $5,000 to $20,000 per project. However, when combined with the contributions of partners, projects that make a measurable difference in communities become possible. At the completion of Five Star projects, each partnership is recognized with a bronze plaque commemorating the effort. Moreover, participants will have experience and a demonstrated record of accomplishment, and will be well-positioned to take on similar projects in their communities. Aggregating over time, these grassroots efforts will make a significant difference in improving the health of our nation's waters and the welfare of our communities.

"This important initiative demonstrates the benefits of innovation in government and the power of public-private partnerships to address environmental challenges facing our country," said the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Administrator Carol M. Browner. "It brings together organizations that help educate and train at-risk youth with local businesses, citizen groups and government agencies to restore wetlands and rivers as valuable assets to communities across America."

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the National Association of Counties and the Wildlife Habitat Council have joined together to administer the Five Star program. Major funding for the program is provided by the EPA. The National Marine Fisheries Service also provides considerable financial support, through their Community-Based Restoration Program, to increase the number of projects undertaken in the nation's coastal regions. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program provides technical and financial assistance to local partnerships.

In its first two years, there has been overwhelming interest in this innovative grant program with over 500 applications received from communities around the country. To date, more than 100 projects have received funding and participating communities are leveraging the $1.1 million in Five Star funding with nearly $6.2 million in additional funding and resources. Given the great interest in the Five Star program, additional partners are being sought to increase the level of funding available to support these community-based restoration activities. This is a particularly good opportunity for groups that seek to leverage their investments. On average, for each dollar invested, five additional dollars in matching funding or in-kind contributions will be provided by restoration partners.

For more information on this program, please visit: **www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/restore/5star**

Project Highlights

- In Washington, the King County World Conservation Corps (KCWCC) will work with the King County Department of Natural Resources, the People for Puget Sound, and others, to conduct wetland restoration activities on a salt marsh of Hamm Creek, a tributary of the Duwamish river. The Hamm Creek Estuary has been identified as prime habitat for chinook salmon, which have recently been listed under the Endangered Species Act. This project will result in two acres of restored estuarine habitat, and will serve as an outdoor classroom for KCWCC's 30 corpsmembers. Volunteers from the local community will participate in three separate events for the project, and will assist in planting shrubs and trees and removing invasive plants.

- Located within the Navajo Nation in Arizona, the Pueblo Colorado Wash will become a model demonstration site for cost-effective riparian restoration techniques that could be applied elsewhere within the Navajo Nation. The project, sponsored by the National Park Service in partnership with the Student Conservation Association, the state of Arizona, and the Navajo Nation, will involve the removal of invasive exotic species, replanting of native vegetation and restoration of stream morphology. Local youth from the Navajo Nation will not only help with a large portion of the on-the-ground restoration, but will also gain valuable knowledge about stream ecology and restoration.

- The Casco Bay Estuary Project, in partnership with the Maine Conservation Corps (MCC), the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, the City of Portland, and the Cumberland County Soil and Water Conservation District, will plant a buffer strip to treat stormwater runoff from a large parking lot before it enters Casco Bay. An interpretive sign will be posted at the site to explain the benefits of the project to the many recreational users of the site. Benefits of this project include reducing untreated stormwater entering the bay, increased wildlife habitat, increased awareness of and community stewardship for the bay and its watershed and engaging local youth in conservation activities.

- In Dover, New Jersey, the Urban Conservation Action Partners has brought together a group of diverse partners including two Boy Scout Troops, Friends of the Rockaway River, employees of Home Depot and the Concerned Hispanic Political Action Committee to restore a 1,200 foot riparian buffer along the Rockaway River, a 40 mile long river that supplies the drinking water for more than 1 million people. The project will involve volunteers from the partner organizations in the hands-on restoration as well as the long-term stewardship and educational activities that will accompany the restoration project.

- Utica Community Action, Inc. will work with the Utica Area Chamber of Commerce, the Utica Zoo, New York Department of Environmental Conservation and others to restore the Utica Marsh and enhance public appreciation of this significant wetland. The marsh has been listed as one of the 100 best places to view wildlife in the state. Project partners will remove invasive plants, trash and other debris from the marsh to enhance its wildlife habitat value. Partners will also develop a nature interpretation trail system for marsh visitors that will enhance public understanding of its value.. In addition to promoting conservation education and tourism, the project will generate economic development opportunities for the local community.

- In downtown Indianapolis, Indiana University/Purdue University will restore native plant communities along 8½ acres of the White River and create an outdoor classroom in order to complete the last key component of a conservation corridor through Marion County. Project partners, including the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, the City of Indianapolis Department of Public Works and others, will work with local students and community members in the planting, maintenance, and monitoring of the project. Teacher workshops will be held in order to

promote the integration of conservation education and experiential learning into middle and high school curricula.

- The Elizabeth River Project seeks to engage the local business community in wetland and habitat restoration in the highly industrialized and urbanized Elizabeth River watershed in southeastern Virginia. The Project provides private landowners along the river with technical assistance and advice on habitat restoration plans for their property. The landowners then become part of a peer-evaluated certification process which ensures community recognition of the valuable environmental work these local businesses have provided. This project compliments existing regional outreach and education initiatives throughout the Chesapeake Bay to engage and educate small business owners about environmental protection, while achieving tangible on-the-ground restoration.

- In the Yampa Valley, The Nature Conservancy of Colorado will conduct riparian restoration efforts in the Morgan Bottoms reach of the Yampa River between Mt. Harris and the Town of Hayden. The Yampa River Restoration Project, which will also involve the Rocky Mountain Youth Corps, the Yampa Valley Community Foundation, and others, will increase habitat for a diverse community of birds and mammals that breed, forage, and winter in the forests and shrublands along the river, including bald eagles, sandhill cranes, river otter, and mink. The bank protection afforded by the woody vegetation will also reduce the amount of sediment in the channel, thus improving water quality and increasing agricultural productivity for local farmers and ranchers. Local community volunteers and students will participate in the on-the-ground restoration work, and a four-day teacher workshop will be held focusing on local river issues.

- In Davenport, River Action, Inc. will undertake on-the-ground restoration work as well as conservation education activities at the Nahant Marsh, a unique 513-acre urban wetland located adjacent to the Mississippi River in the southwest corner of the city. Restoration of the wetlands is an integral part of the management plan for cleaning up this contaminated "brownfield" site. Project partners, including the City of Davenport, the Scott County Regional Authority, local schools and others, will plant native trees and shrubs in order to improve the water quality and wildlife habitat of the marsh, and will renovate an existing building at the site into a classroom and research laboratory for educational programming for all levels of students. Local community residents will be informed about the importance of wetlands through the use of a public-access boardwalk and interpretive signs.

- The City of Moss Point will work with the Crosby Arboretum, Moss Point High School, the Nature Conservancy and others to restore a coastal wetland along the shoreline at Pelican Landing, a new conference facility that will serve as the focal point of an award-winning waterfront revitalization campaign. Students from Moss Point High School's "Tiger Tales" program, which provides educational and vocational training, will be involved in restoring native wetland plants to the site which had previously been used as a dumping ground for junked cars and other debris. Interpretive signs will allow the area to be used as an outdoor classroom for local students and visitors to learn about the diversity and benefits of coastal Mississippi wetlands. The project is considered the first significant step in the City's efforts to enhance the local economy through the revitalization of its waterfront.

- In University City, the Friends of the Green Center will work with the Missouri Department of Conservation, the University City School District and others to restore wetland and riparian habitat. The St. Louis inner-city wetland is part of the "triangle of special places" of the Green Center, a multi-site, geographically-linked outdoor classroom. This restored wetland will serve as an additional outdoor classroom space and regional resource to educate students and members of the community about the function and value of wetlands to filter runoff, provide habitat and stabilize

riparian corridors in an urban environment.

- The New River Community Partners will work with the New River State Park, North Carolina State University, Future Farmers of America, local schools and others to establish a demonstration site for streambank stabilization techniques along the New River, an American Heritage River. Eroding banks within New River State Park and elsewhere along the river constitute both a safety hazard to the general public and a sedimentation problem for fish habitat. As part of the overall effort, the project partners will implement workshops to educate local landowners on how to address similar problems with riverbanks along their own properties. Local high school students and members of a local community youth program will participate in the growing and planting of some of the native plants that will be used to anchor the streambank.

- In Alabama, the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, in partnership with local business, Baldwin County School system, local nonprofits, conservation agencies, and a youth conservation corps, will restore wetlands as part of an outdoor classroom and community park adjacent to the newly constructed J. Larry Newton School. The restored wetlands will serve as a educational resource for the school as students will use it as a laboratory as well as provide on-going stewardship for the area. This wetlands project will also serve as a demonstration project for other local landowners interested in wetlands restoration.

- In Illinois, the Youth Conservation Corps, in partnership with the Lake County Forest Preserves District, the Lake Forest Open Lands Association, the Friends of the Chicago River and the City of Lake Forest, will engage local youth in restoring portions of the Middlefork of the Chicago River and its wetlands. This project is part of a watershed-wide effort to improve the quality of this highly urban stream. Benefits of the program include providing work experience, on-the-job training and conservation education to local youth, increased stream habitat, improved water quality and flood risk reduction along the river.

- In the heart of Cincinnati, the Mill Creek Restoration Project will engage scientists, students, community volunteers, and local residents in restoration of a riparian area located on a brownfield site. The restoration site, formally occupied by a foundry, is now owned by a community center in the inner-city neighborhood of North Fairmont. The project involves the local community heavily in the on-the-ground work relying on 150 middle and senior high school students and 50 local volunteers to conduct the bulk of revegetation of stream banks. In addition to the volunteers, the project will also train and pay 10 local residents from a nearby economically-depressed community to participate in the project.